

Testimony of  
the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance  
for the Appropriations Committee December 9, 2009

**OPPOSED TO GOVERNOR'S DEFICIT MITIGATION PROPOSAL, SECTION DELAYING  
IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION**

This testimony is submitted by Abby Anderson, Executive Director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance strongly opposes the section of the Governor's proposed deficit mitigation plan (November 24, 2009) that would postpone implementation of "Raise the Age" until July 1, 2011. Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction is excellent and overdue policy, and actually saves the state money.

Connecticut is one of only three states to prosecute all 16-year-olds as adults, even for minor crimes. The state is Raising the Age of adult prosecution to 17 (and to 18 in 2012) for sound reasons: (A) kids treated in the juvenile system are less likely to reoffend, and are less likely to escalate into violent crime; (B) adult convictions cut off opportunities for schooling and jobs; and (C) minors in the adult system are at high risk of suicide and victimization.

Raise the Age goes into effect in 23 days, and the state is fully prepared to implement this cost-saving policy. The law was passed in 2007; since that time, responsible state entities – primarily the Judicial Branch and DCF – have gotten programs and staff ready. Police, prosecutors, and defense attorneys have been trained. Municipalities' concerns were addressed: changes were made to ensure that no police department will need renovation, and officer time is reduced through streamlined processing of youth.

**A delay to Raise the Age will have serious consequences.**

- **Safety.** Every day we wait risks young people's lives. Since the Raise the Age law was passed in 2007, another youth killed himself in Manson Youth Correctional Institution in Cheshire, in the adult criminal justice system. There have been no suicides in Connecticut's juvenile justice system in the last 4 years.
- **Crime reduction.** Kids kept in the juvenile system commit fewer repeat crimes. The longer we delay, the more crime we're inflicting on communities.
- **Economic future.** We need our youth in school preparing to participate in our economy rather than be a drain on it through chronic incarceration. We can't afford another year channeling kids toward failure.

**Raise the Age saves the State money.**

In the long term, this state policy will realize cost-savings. There is room in the juvenile system, due to decreases in crime and referrals to court, as well as to systems and programs that successfully divert youth from the juvenile justice system. We have empty beds in juvenile detention and DCF juvenile justice residential programs. Some state agencies say they can incorporate 16-year-olds at **no additional cost**. Looking at this situation in light of the expensive overcrowding in the adult system, how do we NOT move youth out of the adult system sooner rather than later?

Chief Administrative Judge Barbara M. Quinn stated that any savings identified in the mitigation plan won't be realized because the Raise the Age line items are not additional: "...the majority of these targeted funds are already paying for existing staff salaries and operating costs and therefore cannot be saved."

In conclusion, the State should stand by its promise of Public Act 07-4 which ensured youth access to the juvenile justice system in 2010. Raise the Age offers **long-term, systemic financial savings**, and it is critical that Connecticut stay on track for January 1. Now is not the time to stop. Raising the Age is good for the state's economy, for our communities, for public safety, and for our youth and their future. Thank you for your time.